

SENATOR JOHN BREAUX
Opening Statement
AGING COMMITTEE FORUM

Passport to Independence: Battling the Leading Causes of Disability Among Seniors
June 10, 1999

Thank you all for joining us today to learn more about the important role that research plays in ensuring quality of life for our nation's elders. I would like to thank all of our distinguished panelists for joining us today and contributing their expertise to this discussion. I would particularly like to thank Dan Perry and the staff of the Alliance for Aging Research. They have produced a thought-provoking report that will be released today. The report, "Independence for Older Americans: An Investment for Our Nation's Future," offers a new perspective on the importance of investing in medical research. Senator Grassley and I are delighted to showcase this report during our Aging Committee forum today.

The importance of geriatric-related research is greater now than it has ever been in the past. As a nation, we are not only living longer, but we are growing old in greater numbers. Longevity, which was once a isolated rarity, is now a global phenomenon. Advances in technology, medicine and research have helped us to extend our lives tremendously. Prior to the industrial revolution, 1 person out of 40 was over 65. By 1990, it was 1 in 10. And by 2030, it will go up to 1 in 3.

But, the challenge that we face in the new millennium is how to best build upon our success of having achieved longevity. It is not enough to simply add years onto people's lives, we must add life to those years. With the 77 million baby boomers now approaching retirement age, it is even more crucial that we strive for good health during our later years.

And today's panelists will tell us how we can do just that. Through medical research, we can expand our knowledge and capabilities to ensure quality of life and independence for our elders. And by wiping out disabling illnesses, we will not only save billions of Medicare dollars, but we will also improve lives.

I hope today's forum will be one of many Aging Committee events that examines how we can prepare for the aging of the baby boomers. Thank you, Chairman Grassley, for holding this forum today, and for your excellent leadership on this committee. Again, thank you to all of the witnesses and members of the audience for your participation and interest.